

Teachers in Action

Tasks for in-service language teacher
education and development

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Introduction

The idea to write *Teachers in Action* came about as a result of my own experience as a teacher trainer working with non-native-speaker teachers in various contexts. Although the tasks and materials that I have developed for this training work and for use in this book represent a very personal approach to in-service teacher education and development, I hope that they will also offer trainers in different contexts an accessible bank of ideas to employ in their work with teachers.

Who this book is for

Teachers in Action is intended for use by both experienced and inexperienced trainers working in the in-service education and development of primary and secondary foreign language teachers, especially teachers of English. Typically, these teachers will be attending a training, or re-training, programme in their own country, including programmes lasting a period of months, or a series of seminars throughout the teaching year. The teachers will also conform to some of the following characteristics in that they:

- are currently teaching
- are non-native speakers of English
- possibly have limited English
- possibly have limited formal training as language teachers
- are possibly inexperienced in language teaching
- are working in primary or secondary schools (with learners aged 5 to 16+)
- are working in countries or regions undergoing educational reform
- are working with less than perfect resources

Of course, this does not mean that *Teachers in Action* is unsuitable for teachers who do not exactly fit this brief profile, such as native speakers, teachers from different countries who are attending a short training programme in an English-speaking country, or teachers whose training or experience is not limited.

Finally, I hope that the book does not necessarily require the presence of a trainer, so that it is also suitable for teachers meeting in self-help groups, or indeed for highly motivated individuals.

General aims of *Teachers in Action*

It is important to state clearly at the outset that this book does not provide trainers with a series of methodological topics related to professional practice which have been already selected by me, for groups of teachers to work through and look up the answers in a key. Rather, the general aims of *Teachers in Action* are to provide in-service trainers with:

- 1 a broadly focused range of generative tasks and materials that can be used flexibly to meet the needs of different teacher education and development programmes
- 2 an accessible, flexible framework for helping teachers to investigate topics in their schools and classrooms which are relevant to them, in order to further their professional development
- 3 tasks and materials to help to develop teachers' professional knowledge, skills and attitudes, so they can educate their learners more effectively.

Effective in-service teacher education: background issues

I will now describe some important background issues concerning the provision of effective teacher education and development, which in very general terms I understand to mean helping practising teachers to develop their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes¹, in order to educate their learners more effectively. These issues include: teachers' identities, teachers' professional knowledge, skills, attitudes and feelings, education, and change and teacher learning.

TEACHERS' IDENTITIES

Teachers as individuals

A thumbnail sketch of practising primary and secondary teachers might characterise them as ordinary people who lead very busy, often stressful, but potentially rewarding working lives. They have families and other important commitments outside school. Teachers are also, of course, unique individuals, with their own personalities, idiosyncrasies, hopes and concerns. They have different personal and educational histories, and possess professional knowledge about the subjects they teach, as well as professional experience and skills. Significantly, they have beliefs, attitudes and feelings towards aspects of their work. All of these elements change over time.

¹See Section 6.1 for further discussion of terms such as 'teacher education' and 'teacher development'.

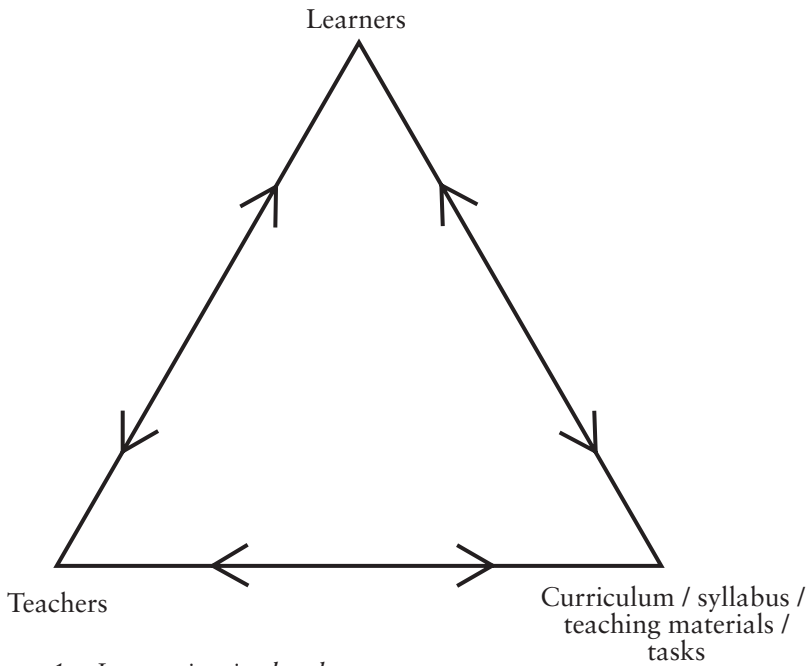


Figure 1 *Interaction in the classroom*

Teachers as social beings

In their professional practice, teachers are also social beings in that they interact with their learners and the curriculum in the classroom in a three-way process, as shown in Figure 1.

The classroom is clearly located within the more extended context of a school: a complex, constantly changing world full of exuberant children learning and playing, and colleagues busily attending meetings and talking to parents.

In turn, this context extends beyond the school gates, consisting of other 'layers', including the local community (a town or city with, for example, school inspectors, teachers' centres, higher education institutions); a region or country (with, for example, government ministries, publishers, national teachers' associations), and beyond this the international community at large (with, for example, organisations such as the European Union, the British Council, and international professional associations such as IATEFL or TESOL).

This social context is important in the present discussion, as the expectations of all the participants involved in the educational process exert an influence on a teacher's behaviour in school and in the classroom. The nearer the participants are to the teacher, the stronger their influence. See Figure 2.

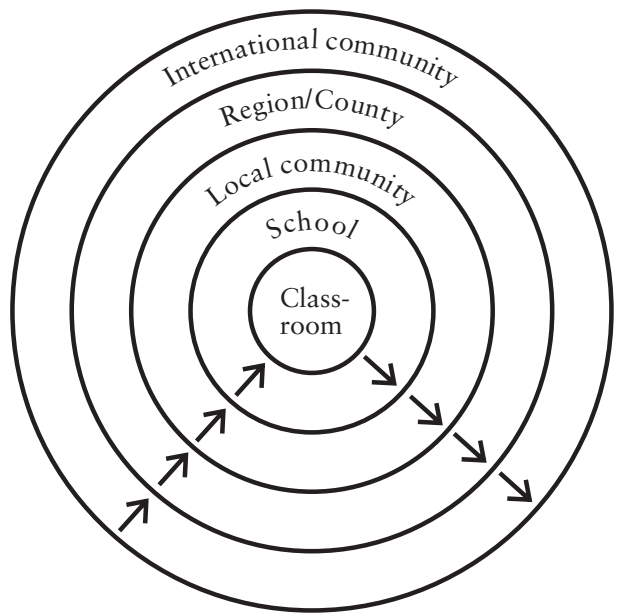


Figure 2 *The social context of educating, teaching and learning*

There is another crucial sense in which teachers are social beings, in terms of their own professional development. In this way, the tasks and materials in *Teachers in Action* are rooted firmly in the principles of ‘social constructivism’: on a training programme, a group of teachers explore and experience certain phenomena together, and as a result construct their own new meanings or personal understandings which did not exist before the programme began. See Section 6.2 for further discussion of this issue. In this social constructivist sense, *Teachers in Action* seeks both to help teachers to find their own individuality and to encourage them to interact and establish links with participants in the different layers of the educational community shown in Figure 2.

TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Teachers already possess professional knowledge when they join a training programme. This knowledge takes the form of ‘personal theories’, defined as a ‘set of beliefs, values, understandings, assumptions – the ways of thinking about the teaching profession’ (Tann, 1993: 55), and which take shape and develop as a result of individuals’ experience as learners and teachers, and as a result of their previous training, to mention but a few sources.

One reason why these personal theories are important is that they help teachers to make sense of their past and present professional experience as educators and teachers. Making sense of experience would include the following: teachers' generalisations (e.g. 'For me a real curriculum contains...'), interpretations (e.g. 'The term "x" is really...'), principles (e.g. 'Schools should...'), feelings (e.g. 'Yesterday I felt pleased with...'), and priorities (e.g. 'We really need to improve...'). A second reason why personal theories are important is that they determine what teachers do in practice in classrooms, which has important implications for teacher education and development, which I outline below. A further important element of personal theories comprises individual teachers' understandings of so-called 'public theory', defined as 'the systems of ideas published in books, discussed in classes, and accompanied by a critical literature' (Eraut, 1994: 70). For English teachers, this might include ideas related to aspects such as what language is or how it is learned. (This idea of exploring public theory is included in aim 7 on p. 12, and in many of the tasks themselves.)

Of course, a teacher's personal theory may not necessarily be completely consistent or logical; perhaps there are gaps, or few connections between its different elements or components. It is also dynamic, changing over time, and highly individual, just as teachers are individuals. Significantly, personal theories are usually tacit or implicit.

One implication of this discussion concerning professional knowledge and personal theories is that an effective in-service programme should exploit fully the knowledge – as defined above – which teachers bring with them. *Teachers in Action* sets out to do so, for example, by deliberately encouraging teachers to reflect on their personal theories; to articulate them explicitly; to compare their own theories with those of their colleagues and so-called public theory; to relate their theories to their professional practice, and as a consequence to develop their own theories.

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

Teachers' professional knowledge – as outlined in the preceding section – is applied to their work in the form of skills, or routinised actions (although, naturally, not everything a teacher does is routinised). For the purposes of this book, I would like to highlight the relevance of the following: those skills related to subject matter, methodology and decision-making, as well as social and enabling skills.

Subject matter skills

Subject matter skills, such as language competence, or the use of the target language in class, are self-evidently of vital importance for language teachers. However, it is not a priority of this book to focus on subject matter skills directly, even though teachers often attach great importance

to this. Instead, interested readers are recommended to consult such sources as Spratt (1994), Wright (1994), Bolitho and Tomlinson (1995), or Thornbury (1997).

Methodological skills

Of obvious importance to effective educating, teaching and learning, is the range of methodological skills required by teachers in the day-to-day world of schools, such as lesson planning, using a cassette recorder, or correcting learners' mistakes. A central feature of *Teachers in Action* is that teachers and trainers are encouraged to draw up shortlists of their own methodological priorities. What the book then does is to provide tasks and materials, for example, to help participants to analyse their current practice concerning these priorities, to read relevant books and articles, to exchange ideas about their priorities and to experiment in schools and classrooms with them.

Decision-making skills

These skills are defined as follows:

Teachers are constantly confronted with a range of options and are required to select from among these options the ones they think are best suited to a particular goal. The option the teacher selects is known as a decision (Kindsvatter, Wilen and Ishler, 1988). Teaching involves making a great number of decisions.

(Richards and Lockhart, 1994: 78)

Richards and Lockhart go on to distinguish between different types of decision: planning decisions (e.g. 'What do I want my learners to learn from this lesson?'), interactive decisions (e.g. 'Are my instructions understood?') and evaluative decisions (e.g. 'Was this lesson successful?') (ibid. 78–89).

By encouraging teachers to involve themselves in decision-making about their own training programme, *Teachers in Action* deliberately seeks to develop teachers' ability to make decisions in their own schools and classrooms, in categories such as those suggested by Richards and Lockhart.

Social skills

Teachers are social beings, and their social skills are of great importance for effective educating, teaching and learning. These social skills include interactive skills, such as communicating and co-operating effectively with learners, as well as with colleagues (e.g. discussing and sharing teaching ideas, problems or concerns), or with parents (e.g. explaining aspects of teaching and learning at parents' meetings), or with other participants in the educational community. The social constructivist principles of *Teachers in Action* (see Section 6.2) explicitly encourage the development of such social skills.

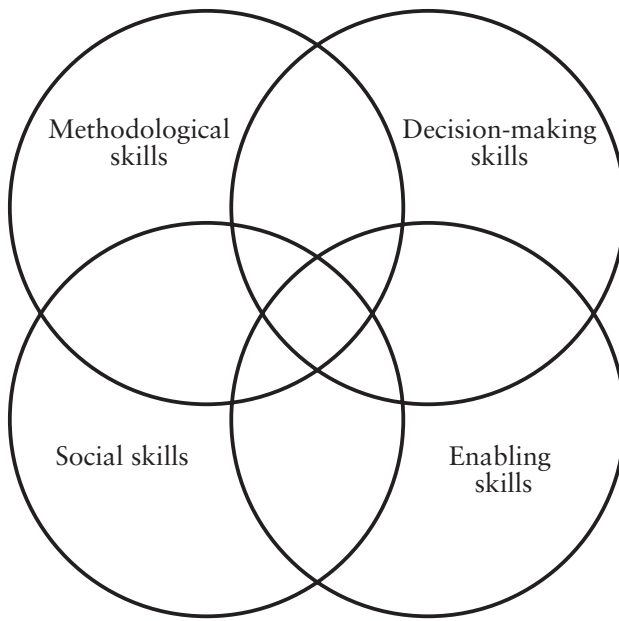


Figure 3 *The skills focus of Teachers in Action*

Enabling skills

Finally, I would like to highlight the importance of professional ‘enabling skills’ in *Teachers in Action*. Enabling skills are those which facilitate career-long teacher learning and include: professional reading skills, presentation skills, investigating, and the capacity to theorise, where the last is defined as the ‘ability to acquire, refine, evaluate, and use theories for the improvement of practice’ (Eraut, 1994: 73). Thus, *Teachers in Action* specifically aims to develop teachers’ level of skills in four of the areas outlined in this section, that is to say, methodological, decision-making, social and enabling skills. See Figure 3.

TEACHERS’ ATTITUDES AND FEELINGS ABOUT THEIR WORK

Naturally, teachers have attitudes and feelings about their work; by ‘attitude’ I understand a ‘way of thinking that inclines one to feel and behave in certain ways’ (Simons *et al.*, 1993: 239). Language teachers, then, feel or behave in certain ways about the language they teach, for example, or the goals and purposes of education; they are often influenced by social forces, such as the status and value of teaching in their region or country, the levels of pay, or the political structure of the school. Of course, many teachers

have positive feelings, hopes, desires and dreams, and are keen to improve aspects of their professional practice, and to find out about new teaching ideas. However, experienced trainers know that teachers may also have many negative feelings, concerns, doubts and worries about their professional practice. For instance, they may have little time for catching up on professional reading, feeling guilty as a result. They may worry about the thorny issue of mixed ability classes, or their learners' motivation. Language teachers may sometimes have low self-esteem, and can be very self-critical about their own command of the language they teach.

Teachers in Action, therefore, deliberately seeks to help teachers to reflect² on and talk about such attitudes and feelings, both positive and negative. This not only enables them to obtain a balanced view of their professional strengths and weaknesses, but also encourages them to take action and identify opportunities to change aspects of their work. In the long term such an approach also helps to enhance teachers' self-esteem and develop their confidence in their own knowledge and skills.

EDUCATION

One question related to primary and secondary teachers' professional practice which is significant in the present discussion is 'What is education?', as there are parallels between the answer to the question and the underlying principles of *Teachers in Action* itself.

A determining characteristic of primary and secondary school teachers' practice is their involvement in the general education of their learners, a goal greater in scope than their specific responsibilities as language teachers. But how to define the purpose of education? Fullan (1993) records that two student teachers view the issue as follows:

I hope my contribution to teaching, along with other good teachers' contributions, will help result in a better society for our future.... (10)

I've always thought that if I could go into a classroom and make a difference in one kid's life ... then that's what I am here for. (11)

In addition to the rather idealistic purposes defined by these students, my own understanding of the term 'education' emphasises the following:

- developing the whole learner (the learner's knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc.)

²By 'reflect' I understand systematic, explicit and critical thinking about professional matters of importance to teachers. For a fuller discussion of the relationship between reflection and teacher development, see Roberts (1998: 47–60). See also aim 3 on p. 10 for an example of how reflecting in the above sense can be applied to teacher education and development.

- applying general and specific educational aims, as expressed in a curriculum, across the whole school;
- preparing learners for life-long learning

The tasks and materials in *Teachers in Action* reflect these priorities, in relation to both teacher education and development and the education of school-aged children.

CHANGE AND TEACHER LEARNING

In our daily lives we are surrounded by the shifting tides of change. Change is natural, varied and complex, simply a part of the way we live. For instance, there is political change when a new government is elected; technological change when a new computer software product is launched onto the market; environmental change when a forest fire pollutes the air with its smoke; and personal change when an individual begins a new job.

The field of education – the focus of this book – is no exception as regards change. Indeed, it is particularly susceptible to change, change of a constant nature. For example, change occurs when new curriculum plans are implemented by a ministry, granting schools more autonomy in running their own affairs. Naturally, learners themselves also change, for example, as they grow older and move up through the school, or as they respond to changes in society. For these and other reasons, therefore, teachers also need to change. If not, they risk being left behind, as the world around them moves on. Change for teachers takes place naturally; they may take on a new administrative role at school, use a new coursebook, experiment with a new idea recommended by a colleague, or apply new technology in class, such as video.

Further characteristics of change are that it is usually slow, as well as difficult, in that it always involves more work for teachers. An apparently simple decision to use video in class for the first time, for instance, requires an already busy teacher to find a time and a place to identify, view and select suitable materials before class.

Two important pre-conditions for change are that the educational system in which teachers are working actively promotes change, and that teachers themselves are ready to and want to change. Teachers must recognise a need to change, as it cannot be successfully imposed by others. Genuine change – in a teacher's knowledge, skills and attitudes – is also a long process, in effect, career-long, and not confined to an all too often short training programme.

Finally, just as with the social context of educating, teaching and learning, the contexts in which teacher education programmes take place are complex and unique, consisting of a variety of factors, including: Who is paying for the programme? Who is teaching on the programme? What

resources are available? How is the programme structured? What incentives are there for the teachers to participate?

A training programme or training materials that work successfully in one context will not necessarily do so in others (see Section 6.3, for example, for two case studies of ineffective in-service training programmes). For this reason, the materials in *Teachers in Action*, whose aim is to deliberately help to facilitate change, need to be flexible to cater for differing contexts and needs, as well as to take into account the views outlined above with regard to the nature of change and teacher learning.

Specific aims of *Teachers in Action*

The following specific aims of this book state explicitly how it sets out to help trainers or teachers to develop or change:

- 1 *to improve the effectiveness of teachers' professional practice as educators and language teachers by developing their existing professional skills and developing new ones*

Of course, teacher education and development can hardly be said to be effective unless it helps teachers to do their work as educators and teachers better, by developing their professional skills (methodological skills, for example). Teachers come to a training programme with certain strengths and weaknesses in these areas, so a programme can develop or fine-tune existing skills, such as correcting learners' spoken language, or develop totally new ones, such as applying new technologies.

- 2 *to help teachers to make more informed, principled professional decisions in the future*

Teachers are required to be able to make the best professional decisions in their day-to-day lives, but in a changing world we do not know what kind of decisions they will need to make in the future. If teachers are well informed about the latest developments in their professional field, if they have reflected critically and systematically about their practice and have been involved in making their own professional decisions, they will be better equipped to cope with new and different problems that arise in the future.

- 3 *to enable teachers to reflect on, discuss and evaluate their current professional practice, and to help them to articulate and develop their personal theories of education, teaching and learning*

Educating, teaching and learning is a complex process. Each teacher comes to a training programme with different knowledge and concerns, and works in different circumstances. This complexity points to the need for teachers to understand better what happens in classrooms, or schools,

which provides an important focus for *Teachers in Action*. The fact that practising teachers are in direct contact with learners in the classroom can be exploited, by encouraging teachers to consider what they already do in schools and classrooms, and by making their current practice explicit. For example, focusing on teachers' tacit personal theories is a vital part of their learning, as they need to reflect on and articulate, as well as analyse, their own (and others') professional ideas, practice and priorities. This is important because it:

- raises teachers' existing knowledge into consciousness
- helps teachers to examine and question their assumptions about education, language teaching and learning
- helps teachers in the long-term task of organising and clarifying their personal theories, and assimilating new information
- develops teachers' critical awareness
- allows trainers and other teachers to gain access to and understand individual teachers' theories

4 *to help trainers and teachers to explore, investigate and understand better what happens in schools and classrooms as an on-going process throughout their careers*

Teachers may consider or evaluate their current practice by identifying those aspects which they are satisfied with (but not 'throwing the baby out with the bath water'); identifying other aspects which they feel need improving, and by exploring and investigating alternative solutions and methods. However, I believe there are no 'right answers' to issues that arise in schools and classrooms, as such; any new understandings which come about as a result of teachers exploring and investigating are not fixed, as circumstances and the learning context change. For trainers and teachers alike, exploring, investigating and understanding is seen as an on-going process, to be sustained throughout their careers.

5 *to harness teachers' individual and collective knowledge and skills, and help them to co-operate more effectively with each other, as well as to join forces with other participants in the educational system*

Acknowledging and respecting the individual and collective knowledge and skills that teachers already bring with them to a training programme is an example of the important principle of 'starting where the teachers are'. It is a foundation of knowledge which can then be socially constructed in a gradual process, or built on together.

6 *to help teachers to select relevant goals for, manage the process of, and evaluate, their learning and professional development*

One way for teachers to construct new, personal meanings is for them to be involved in agreeing on the goals for their own development, and in selecting at least some of the topics to be investigated. *Teachers in Action*

does not therefore prescribe *what* teachers investigate, but it does provide a framework for them to identify their own topics. Such an approach not only increases the relevance of a programme, but can also enhance teachers' sense of ownership of it. It is my view that such an experiential focus provides teachers with a potentially valuable level of learning, particularly when they are encouraged to assess the implications for their own teaching (see also Task 3.6, in particular the reference to Kolb).

- 7 *to provide teachers with a variety of pedagogical practices, materials, resources and ideas, as well as the opportunity to make sense of relevant aspects of the literature in their field, helping them to integrate this new experience and information with their personal theories.*

Of course, teachers delight in finding out about new teaching ideas and procedures, especially by taking part in them actively as learners. This provides opportunities for teachers to learn experientially. Exposing teachers to the thinking of others, that of their colleagues or the authors of professional books for example, is an important way of informing teachers of developments in their field, helping them to construct new meanings related to their professional practice. This can be attempted by helping teachers gain an overview of relevant aspects of the 'public theory', especially the critical literature.

- 8 *to help teachers to experiment with and evaluate new methods, materials and teaching ideas*

As important as the process of experiencing a variety of pedagogical practices, materials, resources and ideas is, it is not enough on its own for significant development to take place. Teachers also learn by assessing the implications of their experience as learners on a programme, and by experimenting in the classroom itself. So, *Teachers in Action* encourages teachers to select teaching ideas from those encountered, to implement them in class, and to evaluate the results.

- 9 *to seek to develop teachers' self-esteem, autonomy and confidence in their own ability to improve the effectiveness of their work*

Helping teachers to gain new knowledge or develop skills is relatively easy, compared with the more difficult challenge of changing teachers' often rather negative attitudes towards aspects of their work! But, without question, if teachers are to sustain learning throughout their careers, they will need certain qualities, such as high self-esteem, autonomy and confidence in themselves.

How this book is organised

The tasks and other resources in this book are presented in six chapters: Chapter 1, Exploring teachers' knowledge; Chapter 2, Identifying topics to investigate; Chapter 3, Exploring a topic; Chapter 4, Investigating in class; Chapter 5, Evaluating learning; Chapter 6, Resources for the trainer. Each chapter begins with an introduction. When taken together, Chapters 2–5 form a cycle, which is supported by Chapters 1 and 6 (see Figure 4).

Trainers may use the cycle in Figure 4 to sequence tasks and materials in a training session or sessions. However, the chapter headings and the investigating cycle itself are only intended to serve as a loosely structured guide. For example, some tasks might easily be placed in more than one chapter, while others deliberately forge links across different chapters.

So, I hope that trainers are able to pick and choose tasks in ways not suggested by the presentation and sequencing in the book, in order to suit their particular needs (see below 'Using the tasks', for more information).

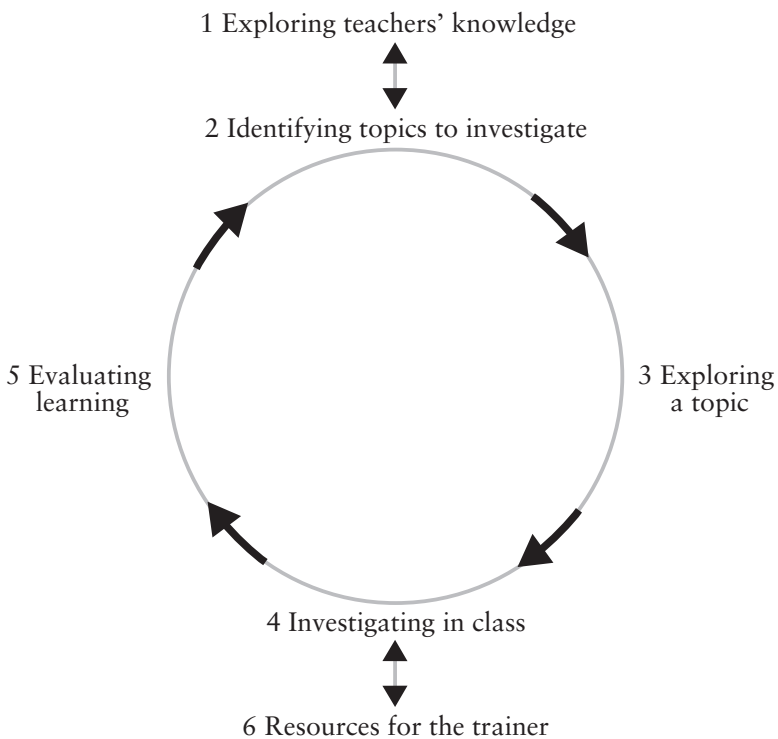


Figure 4 The investigating cycle in Teachers in Action

Investigating

In this section I will discuss issues related to my understanding of the term ‘investigating’, including references to relevant background literature, a practical example showing how teachers might go about investigating, as well as a description of some of its key features and benefits.

I use the term ‘investigating’ deliberately because it avoids some of the academic or technical associations of the term ‘research’. ‘Investigating’ is also less ambitious than a ‘stronger’ form of ‘classroom research’ or ‘action research’, as it is designed to be less demanding of or threatening to trainers and teachers, who might not possess the resources and skills for a more rigorously applied research methodology. See Section 6.4 for information about a case study of a stronger form of action research in mainstream education (Hopkins, 1985).

There are two ways in which I use the term ‘investigating’ in this book. Firstly, in a general sense, I understand ‘investigating’ to be an open, questioning way of viewing education, teaching and learning, such that engaging in any of the tasks or any combination of tasks within the investigating cycle in this book (see Figure 4), constitutes ‘investigating’. In a more specific sense, though, the focus in *Teachers in Action* is on helping teachers to develop their confidence and skills to investigate their work *in class*, as in the tasks in Chapter 4. This I refer to throughout the book as ‘investigating in class’.

BACKGROUND

The approach to investigating in *Teachers in Action* has developed as a result of my discovery of action research in the literature of teacher education, and of the subsequent excitement I experienced when implementing such ideas with teachers (see Roberts, 1998: 258–74 for a detailed account and evaluation of such a training programme). The roots of action research can be traced back in the literature to such authors as Kolb (1984), or Stenhouse (1975), who was concerned with curriculum development in mainstream education. There are numerous publications related to action research in education, including Carr and Kemmis (1983), Elliot and Ebbutt (1985), Hopkins (1985) and Wallace (1998).

In the specific literature of English language teacher education, Maley (1991) highlights the potential of action research as a future development in the field of English teaching practice:

Increasingly both professional researchers and classroom teachers are becoming involved in pragmatically-rooted research ‘at the chalk face’. Typically these research projects are designed to find answers to quite small-scale, specific problems. ... When carried out by teachers, they are a prime tool for teacher development. (29)

The literature also provides examples of different interpretations of the aims and nature of action research; personally, I find the following definitions clear and useful:

the systematic study of attempts to improve educational practice by groups of participants by means of their own practical actions and by means of their own reflection upon the effects of those actions.

(Ebbutt, cited in Hopkins 1985: 32)

small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such intervention.

(Halsey, cited in Bell *et al.*, 1984: 41)

Key terms here for my own understanding of investigating include: ‘systematic’, ‘improve educational practice’, ‘groups of participants’, ‘practical actions’, ‘small-scale’, ‘real world’, which I will develop further in this section.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE OF INVESTIGATING

How might the tasks in this book be used for investigating, as defined above in the general sense? Figure 5 on pp. 16–17 provides the reader with a guide in the form of a detailed, imaginary example of a full cycle of ‘investigating’ in practice. Please note that the example is illustrated with specific tasks from the book. The example features a group of twelve teachers who are attending a year-long in-service teacher education and development programme for secondary teachers of English. They meet once a week at a local teachers’ centre, and are led by a native speaker (of English) trainer, Anne. English is used as a means of communication for the programme, although from time to time the teachers use their own language.

KEY FEATURES AND BENEFITS OF INVESTIGATING

I will now highlight some of the key features and benefits of investigating, referring to Figure 5 by way of illustration.

The teacher as protagonist

Teachers are the main protagonists in their professional development and educational change. In Figure 5, the topic for investigating, ‘mistakes and correction’, is selected because Françoise shows interest in it, rather than the topic being ‘imposed’ by the trainer. In the long term this encourages teachers to take responsibility for their development and change, promoting confidence in their own ideas and skills. Another important feature of investigating is that topics may be investigated with the teachers as protagonists (a) as a whole group, (b) in sub-groups, or (c) individually, as appropriate, or, indeed, by combining the three modes.

Identifying topics to investigate

One of the teachers, Françoise, becomes aware of the importance of oral mistakes and correction, as a result of the trainer's attitudes to and handling of the mistakes in English made by the teachers. Anne, the trainer, does not correct very much; Françoise realises that she does not like not being corrected. In comparison, she feels she corrects her own pupils a lot; she wonders whether this might inhibit their learning. In Task 2.1 Françoise reflects and writes about these and other related issues. Subsequently, in Task 2.4, she discovers that other teachers in the group are also interested in mistakes and correction. The topic is selected as a group priority alongside others, using Worksheet 18 to record these priorities (see Task 2.1). So the group decides to focus on this topic together in the coming weeks.

Exploring a topic

The teachers are also asked to look for articles in teachers' magazines and journals related to the topic, and share them. Despite her anxiety about reading a whole methodology book in English (she has never done so before), Françoise reads *Mistakes and Correction* (Edge, 1989), one of a collection of books provided for the teachers, and which was strongly recommended by a colleague in a review worksheet she had previously completed about the book (see Tasks 2.6 or 3.8). To Françoise's surprise, she finds the book very practical. The issue of mistakes and correction, and teachers' attitudes and assumptions, are then discussed, using both Task 3.1 and Task 3.9. Different technical terms related to mistakes and correction, such as 'error', 'fluency', 'interlanguage', etc., are clarified using Task 3.7, and a variety of correction techniques are demonstrated by the trainer and other teachers in the group, in a workshop in Task 3.6.

Investigating in class

The teachers are then encouraged to experiment with alternative correction technique(s) encountered in the previous workshop, and/or in their reading, in one class of their choice, over a period of two weeks. They organise themselves into three sub-groups, two with teachers working with 13-year-olds, the other with 14-year-olds. They describe what they wish to achieve by using the new techniques in terms of how their pupils might benefit. As they experiment, some teachers keep a teacher diary (see Task 2.7), while others take some photographs of their pupils in class involved in the activities, as in Task 4.3. One group also writes and uses a simple questionnaire in order to find out their pupils' attitudes to mistakes and correction, as in Task 4.4. Anne advises the teachers, answering their questions. Using Worksheet 40, the teachers are encouraged to summarise key points, implications and recommendations related to their investigations in class.

Evaluating learning

In a subsequent session, the sub-groups report back to each other, using ideas and materials from Task 5.7. The results of the questionnaire are presented, the completed worksheets, photos of learners, and key diary extracts are displayed on the walls. Several teachers report that their learners now appear more motivated than before. Following on from this, the teachers evaluate the work they have completed together on the topic of mistakes, using Worksheet 42. One teacher talks about how useful she found the learner questionnaire, and how surprised she was to find out about the pupils' perceptive insights into the topic. So the group of teachers decides to write another questionnaire together to find out about their pupils' views on another topic in the list of priorities which the group had drawn up before, which is ...

See also Section 6.5 for a further sequence of tasks, options and activities taken from this book.

Figure 5 A practical example of investigating

Teachers collaborate with trainers and other colleagues

So, although individual teachers are the protagonists, a vital feature is that the process of investigating takes place in a group, with the support of a trainer and colleagues. This social constructivist, collective orientation helps to develop a sense of what might be called a 'community of learning'. In Figure 5, Françoise discovers that other group members share her interest in mistakes and correction. They also work in sub-groups, focusing on learners of the same age. In addition, Anne, the trainer, is able to recommend suitable reading material, as well as helping teachers to write a questionnaire. Without such support, development would be much more difficult and require great determination. Indeed, if teachers are to help to bring about change in their schools, they will need to work together effectively, as well as with other participants in the educational system. A teacher education programme provides a splendid opportunity to develop such social skills.

Teachers improving practice

A specific aim of investigating is to help teachers to improve their practice with a clear emphasis on practical actions in the real world of the school and the classroom. How can teachers decide which aspects to improve, though? A simple yet effective way is for teachers to think of those aspects of their work that are important to themselves, their learners and their

schools. For example, Françoise and other teachers sense that the way they currently deal with mistakes in class inhibits their learners, so by changing their correction techniques they hope that the overall motivation of their learners will improve.

Investigating by simple means

Techniques which teachers use for collecting information in classrooms, such as writing a short questionnaire, should not be too technical or demanding for them. After all, a teachers' main responsibility is to teach! Because of a lack of time, not all the teachers in Françoise's group are able to write a diary about their experiments, but they are able to take photographs of their learners in action or complete one of the worksheets. So the collection techniques presented in this book are deliberately simple, and seek to be non-threatening and accessible.

'Small is beautiful': being realistic

Individual teachers are recommended to select a specific topic to investigate, for example by monitoring the introduction of one teaching idea with one group of learners for a limited period of time, as my own experience convinces me that 'small is beautiful'. For instance, rather than investigating the topic of 'correction', a somewhat diffuse, vague focus, teachers might investigate the 'correction of oral mistakes in fluency activities' for two weeks, as in Françoise's group. Such a small-scale, 'narrow' focus enables teachers to maintain control of the process of investigating, while at the same time providing a framework for the analysis of more global educational issues, such as 'motivation' in Françoise's group. In the whole group, teachers could also cover more ground, as it were, by focusing on slightly different aspects of correction. Finally, Hopkins' advice to teachers as to the focus of classroom research should also be adhered to: 'do not tackle issues that you cannot do anything about' (1985: 47).

Being systematic

In their working lives, teachers do instinctively analyse their work, for example by reflecting on the effectiveness of a lesson while walking across the school playground after the lesson, as follows:

Now, was this lesson successful? Yes, the first activity worked quite well, although maybe next time I should....

However, it is unlikely that teachers keep a diary in which they regularly record such reflections, as they are encouraged to do in this book. Being systematic in this way will help Françoise and her colleagues to develop in an organised way, as well as helping them to monitor their learning.

The results of investigating are shared

One limitation of investigating is that it takes place in a specific local context, so any findings cannot claim to be valid beyond this context, or to contribute to a general body of professional understanding. However, the results of learning in *Teachers in Action* are deliberately made available to other teachers in the group, to the trainer, or possibly to other teachers in the same community, enabling them to join forces with and learn from the experience of the investigating teachers. For instance, Françoise and her colleagues record the conclusions reached about the topic of mistakes and correction on a worksheet which is displayed on the training room wall. It has been suggested that such classroom research by teachers enables them to acquire:

more power over their professional lives and be better able to create classrooms and schools more responsive to the vision they and we have of our children's future.

(Hopkins, 1985: 129)

Teachers as reformers

Schön explicitly highlights strategies for teachers to gain the power advocated by Hopkins:

If you train a teacher to be very independent, not only to look for the right answer, to face up to her own way of learning, who wishes to reflect in action, in her work with pupils and in her relationship with them, ... this teacher will become a kind of reformer.

(in Sancho and Hernández, 1994: 92; my translation)

Teachers in Action seeks to develop the kind of teacher reformers described by Schön, that is to say, teachers who themselves can bring about change in classrooms and schools, in collaboration with their learners and others in the educational community.

The tasks

The tasks and other resources in this book offer the trainer pedagogic procedures for achieving the aims listed above. In this section, I will outline the following issues related to the tasks: background, using the tasks and the task format. See the contents list for a complete list of tasks.

BACKGROUND

Task-based materials for the language teacher trainer are already available in published form, such as Parrott (1993), Wajnryb (1992), Richards and

Lockhart (1994), and, for primary teachers, Pollard and Tann (1993). The literature concerning the use of tasks in language teaching and language teacher education, such as Nunan (1989), Ellis (1990) and Wallace (1991), has also been useful for me, by supplying the theoretical background, as well as key concepts such as tasks, input, activities, procedures, output and outcomes.

Expressed simply, teachers learn by ‘acting’, in the broadest sense of the word, that is to say, by being actively involved in processes such as reflecting, experiencing, experimenting, selecting, reading, discussing and theorising. In this respect, the word ‘action’ in the title of this book is also intended to highlight the crucial nature of teachers’ own activity, whether physical, intellectual or otherwise, in their own development and educational change. The tasks in *Teachers in Action* therefore seek to involve and support teachers as actively, co-operatively and purposefully as possible in relevant, interesting and challenging activities related to their professional realities.

USING THE TASKS

Teachers in Action is intended to be used as a resource book, not as a training coursebook. Depending on the trainer’s experience, skills, training context and needs, and the resources available, I hope that these flexible tasks can be used in one or more of the ways listed below.

Selecting individual tasks

The tasks are designed to be ‘free-standing’, allowing trainers to dip into the book. Trainers are therefore able to select and use individual tasks without modification, so that they fit in with other procedures which the trainers already employ. Of course, the chapters present the tasks in a certain order, but trainers are encouraged to enter this order at any point and select relevant tasks.

Adapting tasks

The tasks are designed to be generative. Trainers may wish to try to exploit this potential, by using the tasks as ‘models’ and adapting them, so that they are more closely tailored to their own contexts and needs. For instance, trainers might be attracted by Worksheet 31 used in the Task 3.7, for which teachers are required to examine terms related to the topic of language acquisition and learning. Trainers can then adapt this task by using the blank worksheet for the actual topic they wish to focus on with their own teachers. Some worksheets can also be used for several tasks; for example, Worksheet 27 may be used not only for Task 2.9, but for others, such as Task 3.1.